

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMCONSUL STRASBOURG
TO AMEMBASSY PARIS
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UNCLAS STRASBOURG 70

E.O.11652: N/A
TAGS: FR, ELAB.
SUBJECT: DISRUPTION OF OPERATIONS AT GENERAL MOTORS STRASBOURG
PLANT.

1. WORKER OCCUPATION OF THE POWER-HOUSE OF THE GENERAL MOTORS PLANT IN STRASBOURG IS ENTERING ITS SECOND WEEK, WITH NO SOLUTION OF THE OUTSTANDING ISSUES YET IN SIGHT. THE MANAGEMENT OF THE LARGEST SINGLE STRASBOURG EMPLOYER K2,200) WHICH MAKES AUTO-MOBILE CARBURETORS AND AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSIONS HAS BEEN FORCED TO DRASTICALLY CURTAIL OPERATIONS SINCE THE WORKERS IN CONTROL AT THE POWERPLANT HAVE CUT OFF THE COMPRESSED AIR NEEDED TO OPERATE MOST OF THE PLANT S ASSEMBLY MACHINERY AND AIR CONDITIONING SYSTEM. EFFORTS OVER THE WEEKEND TO SET UP PORTABLE EQUIPMENT WHICH WOULD HAVE ALLOWED GENERAL MOTORS TO RESUME MUCH OF ITS OPERATION WERE THWARTED BY THE OCCUPYING WORKERS, NOW NUMBERING ONLY ABOUT 15, WHO CONTINUE TO OCCUPY THE POWER-HOUSE DAY AND NIGHT.

2. THE OCCUPATION STARTED FEBRUARY 21 AS A WORKER PROTEST IN FAVOR OF A PAID HALF-HOUR LUNCH PERIOD FOR THE DAY SHIFT (THIS ALREADY EXISTS FOR THE NIGHT WORKERS) AND A CHANGE OF THE TWO SHIFT SCHEDULE WHICH WOULD RESULT IN A HALF-HOUR REDUCTION IN THE PLANT S PRESENT DAILY OPERATING TIME. EFFORTS TO RESOLVE
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THE SITUATION THROUGH THE COMITE D ENTREPRISE , DOMINATED ON THE WORKER SIDE BY THE CGT AND CFDT, HAVE SO FAR BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL.

3. GM OFFICIALS TOLD US THAT THEY ARE ATTEMPTING TO GET A COURT ORDER TO EVICT THE WORKERS, WHOM THEY DESCRIBE AS QUOTE A YOUNG GROUP OF EXTREMISTS UNQUOTE. HOWEVER, THEY FEAR THAT

LOCAL AUTHORITIES WILL HESITATE TO ENFORCE ANY COURT INJUNCTION BECAUSE OF THE NEARNESS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. GM S PRESENT ATTITUDE IS TO LET THE OCCUPATION QUOTE RUN ITS COURSE UNQUOTE, HOPING THAT SUPPORT WILL WANE AMONG UNCOMMITTED WORKERS WHO REMAIN IDLE AND WILL BE LOSING PAY. GM ALSO FEELS THAT THE TIME HAS COME FOR A HANG-TOUGH ATTITUDE, SAYING THAT THE FIRM HAS BEEN QUITE GENEROUS OF LATE IN PROVIDING AND INCREASING BENEFITS. UP TO NOW, THE UNREST HAS TAKEN PLACE CALMLY AND WITHOUT ANY SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE TO COMPANY FACILITIES. NOR HAS THE LABOR TROUBLE AT GM BEEN BROUGHT INTO THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN.

4. COMMENT: OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS GM HAS HIRED SEVERAL HUNDRED WORKERS AND IS A BRIGHT SPOT IN THE LOCAL ECONOMIC PICTURE. GM S DOUBTS ABOUT GETTING THE PREFECTURE TO PURSUE POLICE EVICTION OF THE POWER-HOUSE OCCUPIERS ARE WELL FOUNDED. ON THE OTHER HAND, SOME BUSINESSMEN HERE ARE CONCERNED OVER WHAT EFFECT SUCH INACTION MIGHT HAVE ON CONTINUED GM EXPANSION, AS WELL AS SETTING A BAD PRECEDENT IF LABOR AGITATION INCREASES - AS MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT - AFTER MARCH 19. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF THE LABOR AGITATORS STRATEGY OF PICKING ON THE LARGEST AREA MULTINATIONAL AT AN OSTENSIBLY VERY FAVORABLE MOMENT WILL BRING THEM THE SHORT-TERM RESULTS THEY SEEK. AT LEAST ONE LOCAL VIP IS ATTEMPTING TO GET THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TO INTERVENE. KURZE

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